TLEEC Supports Texas College Students’ Access to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Services
TLEEC Testimony on Implementation of SB 17, submitted by Rebekah Skelton to the Texas Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education, May 14, 2024

Dear Chairman Creighton and Members of the Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education:

My name is Rebekah Skelton, and I am testifying on the harmful impacts of the implementation of Senate Bill 17 on behalf of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC). TLEEC is a statewide collaborative with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, focusing on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state, and national levels for high-quality education, including enhanced college access and success.

During the 88th Regular Session, TLEEC testified against SB 17 due to its anticipated discriminatory impact on historically marginalized college students, including Black, Latino, first-generation and LGBTQ+ students and students in families with limited means. Although the law only went into effect in January, SB 17 has already resulted in a deep chilling effect on student, faculty and administrator free speech; the availability of campus-based student support services; and students’ college access and affordability opportunities across Texas colleges and universities (Kepner, 2024). Under pressure to comply with the law, universities have taken drastic actions that have negatively impacted the well-being of campus communities and rolled back decades of progress in equity and inclusion.

In recent months, Texas colleges and universities have shut down outreach programs and cultural centers, eliminated centers that provided academic supports and scholarship opportunities, terminated important staff and faculty positions, and ended cultural celebrations, such as graduation ceremonies for Black, Latino, and LGBTQ+ students. In some cases, university administrators have even eliminated positions and programming outside the requirements of the law, fearing that a mistake or oversight will result in a loss of important school funding (Rodrigues, 2024).

As a recent graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, I have seen firsthand how implementation of SB 17 has hurt my fellow classmates and the campus community. In April, UT announced it would close the Division of Campus and Community Engagement to comply with SB 17. This university initiative was dedicated to integrating access and belonging into the university’s core mission and supporting students who struggle the most to access education. The DCCE connected students to mentors, tutoring opportunities, community and on-campus resources, and leadership opportunities. While these services were available to all students, the DCCE specifically focused its support on historically underserved populations, who most needed assistance.

Make no mistake: Students across Texas are less prepared to succeed in school and beyond without the resources and programs like the ones available through diversity, equity and inclusion offices, like UT’s
Division of Campus and Community Engagement.

**Recommendations**

As a result of SB 17, college campuses have become dominated by a culture of fear and mistrust, leaving students and staff disconnected from the campus supports on which they previously relied. We urge the subcommittee to:

- Repeal SB 17 and appropriate state funding to support institutions of higher education to reinstate offices of diversity, equity and inclusion and corresponding student centers and services;
- Clarify the exempted activities outlined in SB 17 to institutions and require them to add that clarity in their institutional guidance to protect against the overreach of compliance with SB 17 as passed; and
- Invest in university support services that emphasize equity and college access for all Texas students.

Students deserve access to safe, equitable college and university campuses. This is critical to their academic success, college outcomes and campus experiences. Thank you for your consideration.

*For questions, contact TLEEC coordinators, Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA (chloe.sikes@idra.org) or Jaime Puente at Every Texan (puente@everytexan.org).*

**Citations**


The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. The coalition convenes organizations and individuals who advocate in the interest of public school students at the local, state and national levels.

**TLEEC Member and Additional Signatory Organizations**

ARISE Adelante  
Asian Texans for Justice  
Austin Justice Coalition  
Big Thought  
Black Brown Policy Dialogues  
Black Parents and Families Collective  
Breakthrough Central Texas  
Children at Risk  
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD)  
Culturingua  
Dr. Hector P. Garcia G.L. Forum  
Easterseals Central Texas  
Educators in Solidarity  
Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX)  
Every Texan  
Houston Community Voices for Public Education  
IDRA  
Measure  
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership  
Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI)  
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)  
Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA)  
National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)  
San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
SEAT (Students Engaged in Advancing Texas)  
Southwest Region Youth Legislative Action Center  
Texas American Federation of Teachers  
Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)  
Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)  
Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (TADOHE)  
Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)  
Texas Faculty Association  
Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)  
Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)  
Texas NAACP  
Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA)  
The Arc of Texas  
UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)

*Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition*